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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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This World of Illusion

*O Saints, this carnival will end in a short while;
we will depart after watching this show.
Never again will you meet those
who have gathered here together.
Many travellers from different directions
cross the river in a boat – they meet
only to go their separate ways a few moments later.
There are many different flowers making the garden beautiful,
filling it with sweet fragrances.
Buds appear, blossom into flowers and wither away –
petal by petal they perish.
The happiness from wife, children and property is fleeting,
like dew drops on petals.
They meet you here and leave you here –
why then grieve over them?
In this give and take, each action has its consequence,
so do your real work.
Develop love for the Lord, who is your real benefactor.
Saints explain that great merit
lies in keeping the company of true devotees.
O Charandas, Guru Sukdev has explained,
contemplate on the Lord alone.*

Sant Charandas



Living with Joy

Living with joy means to live in the consciousness of our true being and not in the orbit of the mind. When we live in the orbit of the mind we are engulfed by emotions and agitating thoughts that prevent us from experiencing joy, whereas to live with joy is to live in the remembrance of our Master. It is to be saturated with our simran, which literally means remembering.

Simran is a wonderful and powerful mechanism – it is the repetition of the words given to us at the time of initiation to help us remember our Master. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. I, the Great Master discusses this practice:

What is simran? In order to understand it properly, one has to pay attention to its true significance. The word 'simran' is derived from the Sanskrit root smar. It has several meanings: To protect, to make a mental picture of one's deity in the heart, and to contemplate on this form, to remember a certain person or thing to such an extent as to think about it with every breath, to make it a part and parcel of one's life, and ultimately to awaken into and to live in it. ... Simran bestows happiness, peace and bliss, and leads us to a state of super-consciousness.

Therefore our simran, when correctly practised, can create joy in our lives. We experience joy when we are at peace and our mind is at rest. Through the practice of simran, we are able to change our thinking and stop our agitating and unnerving emotions, thereby creating inner peace. However, for simran to bring pure joy into our lives we have to be totally immersed in it. We cannot simply 'dip in here and dip

in there' – it doesn't work that way. Our simran should constantly reverberate in us – day in and day out, moment to moment. We may not enjoy doing simran at first, but in time we will get joy from it.

Not only are we the result today of past thoughts and actions, but we are currently creating what we will be in the future. What are we going to harvest from our present actions and thoughts? The way to determine this is through the practice of simran – by changing thoughts of the world into thoughts of the Master. It is simran that takes us to and opens the tenth door where we meet the Master's Radiant Form. This meeting will signify real joy because thereafter we will always be aware of our Master's presence.

Simran is the real way to be in touch with our Master. We may doubt the power of simran and how our repetition protects us and draws us closer to the Master, but we should never underestimate it. In her book *In Search of the Way*, Flora Wood writes:

Simran can also be of assistance to steady the mind and as a means of spiritual protection at any moment of danger or stress, for it has all the power of the Master behind it.

Every Sant Mat book we have tells us of the joy and delight we can experience through the practice of simran and bhajan. If we are not experiencing the joy we are probably not practising correctly. When we do it correctly we will want to do it, and when we want to do it, we will do it correctly. We should guard against being casual about simran. It should receive our highest priority because it enriches every aspect of our lives. Simran is not a penance, it is an opportunity, and when practised properly we can benefit from it.

We have been given a ticket for the flight to Sach Khand. Simran is the taxi fare to get us to the airport to catch the flight – if we don't use it we won't get to the airport to board the plane.

But how mindful are we of what we are trying to achieve when we do our simran? Do we simply rattle off the words mechanically or are we conscious of the tremendous power that has been entrusted to us in the form of our simran? Are we attentive to our simran or are we just repeating it automatically while our mind runs wild – regurgitating the emotions and distorted thinking that fill much of our day?

In *In Search of the Way* the author gives us this valuable insight into the practice of simran:

At first simran could seem meaningless, but gradually, if we were to do it every day – at any and every time whilst doing our work or resting, whilst on journeys, the housewife in her kitchen or the man of the house doing his work – it would become automatic, running on subconsciously and then coming to the surface consciousness when we had a free mind again. We would then think: “Why am I saying these words? Oh! they are connected with the Master,” and we would be drawn in thought towards Sant Mat.

Simran is a divine opportunity, a gift to inspire us, for it is our simran that leads us into the divine rhythm of the Shabd. In the book *Tukaram: – The Ceaseless Song of Devotion* the poet tells us:

*My Master has blessed me
And now I live in the rhythm
Of the divine Melody.*

We should never fall into the mind trap of regarding simran as a chore. If we do then we seriously need to re-think our thinking. By obsessively worrying about not being able to meditate or do simran, we buy into habitually thinking of failure – a joyless process. When we

appreciate the privilege we have been given to be able to do simran, it makes it virtually impossible to feel negative about it. Instead of viewing simran as a chore we notice all the things we enjoy about it. When our attitude is positive our perspective is heightened and we focus less on the irritations and annoyances the mind throws at us, and more on the aspects of simran that are delightful and pleasant. Our simran – when done correctly – should resonate with a joy that is truly infectious. It sings to our soul, bringing peace and joy.

Maharaj Jagat Singh says of the practice of simran:

This method is natural, though very slow. It requires years of practice to make the mind motionless. ... Therefore, the time spent on repetition should never be considered wasted. ... Again, I shall urge upon you to work hard on your simran and not to expect results in a hurry. Slow and steady wins the race.

The Science of the Soul

Simran is the vehicle that takes us to the eye focus. It is a slow process of unfolding awareness. In your simran, know the pace at which to go. In *Living Meditation* we are told:

To be successful in this practice, the repetition of the words should be done at a comfortable pace: not so fast that we get anxious, nor so slow that we fill the gaps in between the words with thoughts.

When we realize that the practice of simran has the power to change our lives, we will become aware of its magic. This magic brings wonder and joy into our lives. This is the feeling we want to carry into our meditation – of being alive, aware and interested in what we are doing.

Initiation gives us direction and the opportunity to find inner peace, and to live joyfully. Whatever we achieve by the time we die will be from the effort we have put into our meditation. We should be clear about our intent and be careful not to unnecessarily dissipate our energy on external affairs. To prevent this the Masters recommend that we repeat the words inwardly during the day whenever the attention is free.

This bright thread of simran is like a beautiful necklace strung across our day, not only bringing joy into our lives, but also as our way of connecting with our Master. Through this we become aware of his constant presence; and we will come to know, without a doubt, that he has always been with us and is always with us. This is the reward of constant simran. By participating in our spirituality and by harnessing the power of simran we have the ability to make our meditation an exhilarating experience. Rumi puts it like this: “You are the universe in ecstatic motion.”

The magic of simran has been entrusted to us, and it resonates in each one of us when we do it with loving and focused attention. What an incredible treasure has been placed in our custody! Simran is a precious gift – let’s use it!



Love and unswerving faith in the Master play a vital role in the success of simran. In fact, the results of the repetition of the names will be in direct proportion to the love and faith brought to bear upon it. Names of the Lord have a great power. When the repetition is done with faith, one feels intoxicated with joy, to the extent that he forgets his body and feels only the presence of the Master.

The Dawn of Light



Managing Change

The one constant we face is change. Whether it is small and almost imperceptible or whether it is catastrophic and traumatic – it is constant. Our thinking determines how we manage change and our emotions are linked to our thinking. Therefore, what we think determines our emotions, which in turn determine the level of peace we have in our lives.

In his book *When Everything Changes, Change Everything*, Neal Donald Walsch writes:

You may not be able to change the fact that things are changing, but you can change your thought about the things that are changing.

Our thinking determines the way we see the world. It is our thinking that determines how we will be affected by the karmic events that come our way and through which we create our reality – which is often distorted because of our conditioned thinking. How often have the Masters told us that the only thing we can change is our attitude? And we change our attitude by changing the way we think and how we react to the events in our lives. Walsch continues:

Reality is not what's happening, it's what we think is happening. We don't experience what's going on outside, we experience what's going on inside about what's going on outside.

Perception is our ability to interpret and understand – it is our discernment or insight. Our thinking is based on our perceptions – which

are partly based on how society conditions our thinking, as well as often-unreliable second-hand information from other people, along with our interpretation and faded memories of our own previous experiences. Some of these experiences may go back to previous lives because their sanskaras are so deeply engrained in us.

Sanskaras are the impressions or imprints left on the mind by both our interpretation of events and our experiences in previous lives. These impressions are accumulated and carried forward from life to life. They now colour this life – our nature, responses and states of mind. But are these clouded impressions relevant to our life and thinking in the twenty-first century?

We can compare the accumulation of sanskaras to a lens. Whatever we see through a lens is conditioned by the focus of the lens. Similarly, everything we do or perceive is conditioned through the lens of our perception – we perceive through the impressions, effects, tendencies, imprints and conditioning of our sanskaras. And yet they are neither factual nor correct. They are simply our interpretations of interpretations of interpretations – years of false conditioning.

Our thinking is constantly being shaped and manipulated by our sanskaras, and we believe that what we think of as reality is a true representation of an event. We seldom stop to think about the effect of the lens we are looking through – whether it is in focus or distorted. Therefore, what we experience is determined by how we allow the mind to influence what we experience.

It is such a subtle part of our thought process that we are not even aware that this mental conditioning is taking place, and yet we believe our own distorted thinking – from which we create our distorted reality, spawned from our emotional reaction to outside events. When we accept that we create our reality through our thinking, we realize

that we can change that reality. We change our reality by changing our mind. It is as simple as changing the way we think.

We often cause pain and suffering – to ourselves and others – because of our distorted view of events. In *Living Meditation* the author writes:

When someone in this world does something we don't like, the most common response is to react and to try to change that person. We get angry because the world isn't the way we want it to be.

A challenge we all face is to accept that we all view and experience events differently. Therefore we should not become irritated and react unkindly when someone else's thinking is different from ours.

Our bodies constantly change. Our circumstances – which often seem boring in their repetition – are in fact constantly changing. It is important to realize that change means an adjustment is taking place. The thing to be aware of is that when change happens, our lives will never again be the same as they were. It means things will be different from now on. How we cope with that difference will indicate whether or not we find peace and joy within ourselves. But if we cannot let go of the past and we constantly fight to try and make our outer circumstances as close as possible to what they were before the change happened, peace and joy will elude us. The more we focus on what cannot be – on what has passed – the more we perpetuate our misery.

Unfortunately our thinking is also frequently conditioned by what society dictates. Much of the pain and trauma we experience may be as a result of our attempts to conform to what society defines as 'normal'. But normal according to whose distorted reality? Every action, every thought, every approach is conditioned by our sanskaras and is unique

to the individual, therefore there cannot be a ‘normal’ approach to any situation. But our thinking is so conditioned that it traps us in old patterns of thought, binding us to our own web of negativity.

‘Thinking out of the box’ is exactly that – it is to shake off our old thinking and approach a situation from a fresh and different perspective. We do not have to allow our thinking to become so entrenched that we are shackled to it for life. Why do we continue along such a restricted path instead of breaking free? Walsch tells us that we can be free of emotional turmoil, anguish and frustration, anxiety and fear – the unwelcome emotions that so often accompany unwanted change and life disruptions.

Our way of thinking creates our emotions, therefore we can be in control of our emotions. We do not have to be victims of our thoughts. We can move from being miserable to being happy by challenging and changing our thoughts.

Hazur Maharaj Ji has said:

We have to go through a combination of good and bad karmas during this span of life. So we have to go on adjusting to every situation. So we need to change our attitude. Then we will be relaxed and happy. If we refuse to adjust to these situations, then we will be miserable. Our relatives have to die, for example. If we accept that as his will, then it is all right. If we refuse to accept it, we will be miserable.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Changing our attitude means changing our thinking. It is not always easy to do, but it definitely can be done. The truth is that we have always allowed our thoughts free rein and suffered the consequences of our unbridled thinking. To be able to change our

thoughts we must be conscious of what we are thinking; then when an unwanted emotion begins to arise in us, we will be aware of the thought that is creating that emotion and we can immediately stop the thought. Stop the thinking that is creating the unwanted emotion. Stop perpetuating pain, fear, anxiety or anger.

Imagine the change that will take place when we die. Imagine moving from the ever-changing physical world to the constant, changeless inner world which is our birthright. The author of *Living Meditation* writes that it is the privilege of human beings to experience the changeless, deathless and blissful nature of our own true self. And Rumi comments: “My soul is from elsewhere, I’m sure of that, and I intend to end up there.”

Maharaj Jagat Singh says in *The Science of the Soul*:

The Maker himself is unchangeable but the world which he has created is constantly undergoing change. Living beings come into this world and then die. The vegetable and the mineral kingdoms are also subject to change. The Creator alone is eternal and everlasting.

The magic of Sant Mat is the change that takes place within each one of us. Our thinking is changing, our approach to life, our diet – so much has changed that we hardly recognize ourselves. Could we ever have imagined such change? As Rumi says:

*Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world.
Today I am wise, so I am changing myself.*

While change can be one of the hardest things to deal with, we need to embrace it because it is absolutely necessary for us to evolve

and grow – both physically and spiritually. Growth is determined through an exchange of the old for the new. We may not be aware of the spiritual changes taking place within us, but our Master certainly is aware of how we are slowly shaping our future within.

Two South Africans entrepreneurs, Ronnie Apteker and Jeremy Ord, have written about changes in the IT industry:

When we attempt new things, we begin to re-examine all the habitual and routine things we took for granted. We have the ability to, and we constantly do, reinvent ourselves. As our thought patterns change, we strive to identify and nurture ourselves to think differently. If we can do that and if we have the energy, breadth and vision, we will continue to grow and with that growth and the acceptance of change we will find contentment, joy and happiness.



*As is man's own mind,
so sees he the mind of another.
As is man's desire,
so becomes his state of mind.
As are one's deeds, so is one attuned.
Seeking the true Guru's advice,
man finds the house of peace.*

Guru Nanak, in *Discourses on Sant Mat*, Vol. II



This Then Is Bhakti

In her book *In Search of the Way*, the late Flora Wood describes many wonderful experiences she had with Maharaj Charan Singh at the Dera in the 1960's. Here she shares her thoughts, and some of Maharaj Ji's words, on devotion:

We will slowly, by ardent and assiduous practice, learn to discriminate and begin to see, in some small measure, the path our Satguru is trying to show us. At first, due to the jangle of our worldly life, we cannot discern the full glory of the harmony within us; but it is there, just as surely as fire is latent in wood, which, on being rubbed in the correct manner, springs to life.

[The Master said:] *"The whole secret lies in devoting ourselves so wholeheartedly to our Master's instructions that we not only resemble him whom we love, but literally become him!"*

Yes, I thought, this is what is meant by bhakti – true devotion. It is to love one's Master and all for which he stands, so devotedly and tenaciously that all intervening material forces are dissolved and one automatically merges in him. This, then, is bhakti! Sach Khand is here and only my will stands in the way. . . .

But the trouble is, I thought, that I cannot hold this idea in my mind all the time. I will get up from here and the world will flood in and the glory of this thought will be dissolved like sunlight in the little boy's jug. What can I do to keep it?

Scarcely had I thought this when the Master's voice again reached my consciousness: "Man himself is utterly helpless, like a feather blown by the wind and is only given a sense of direction when God smiles on him. We are all beggars at his door and only by continually begging can we obtain his grace and then in his compassion he will hear and give us all."





Maharaj Charan Singh

When the Beloved Feels Far Away

Of all human experiences, feeling close to our Master is potentially the most fulfilling and significant experience we could have. Yet at times we may feel distant from him. With our attempts to reach him, we may experience what we perceive as stony silence – a silence so deafening it drowns out every thought but this: The Master has abandoned me. We talk to him, and it seems that no one is listening. We feel anxious, confused, bereft.

But could we simply be making a mistake in our expectations of what it should feel like to be in touch with our Master? Experiencing the Master in our lives might occasionally coincide with a warm gooey feeling or some other emotion, but the moment we begin to expect certain feelings and emotions to coincide with spiritual reality, we may be headed for disappointment. In both physical and spiritual matters, emotions and reality don't always line up.

For instance, if someone handed us a million-dollar cheque, we could throw it away simply because we don't believe it is real. Similarly, we could also disregard a unique opportunity to be with our Master just because we don't believe it is real. In other words, what we *feel* is irrelevant. What matters is objective fact, not feelings.

In *Living Meditation* we read: "Emotion, rightly directed, becomes devotion." In the same book the author quotes Maharaj Charan Singh:

Emotions are all right if they lead you to devotion, but they should be channelled. If you let loose your emotions, they become a nuisance. If the river flows within its banks, only then it is useful. But when the river floods, it overflows its banks and creates devastation everywhere.

As we travel on the path, we will receive more and more evidence that we really are in contact with our Master, but growing such awareness takes time. Much of Master's work is not immediately obvious. Everyone has times when they feel nothing, because Master wants us to learn to trust him rather than our emotions. He wants us to learn that whatever else changes, he remains rock solid – totally dependable.

When we go from a valley to a mountain top we may feel very different, but nothing in us has actually changed. All that happens is that we can see farther. When we become conscious of our Master's love for us or we feel his presence, it is not that the Master has suddenly become more loving nor that we have become more lovable; it is just that from a spiritual mountain top we see reality more clearly. We can look back and see – to our great surprise – the progress we have made. We see how, when it seemed that our Master had deserted us, he must have still been directing us, because we took exactly the right route. We feel different when we can see farther. Then too, when our life seems dark, it feels as if nothing has changed. But it is just that we cannot see or feel our Master's love and closeness at those times.

Regular meditation is our lifeline to the Master. If we neglect meditation, it actually compounds the sense of distance from the Master. So it is not the Master abandoning us – it is we who are drifting away from him. We need to make an effort to meditate even if we don't always feel like it. Maharaj Charan Singh used to say that were it not for his grace, we would never even think of our separation from him, nor would we desire to return home.

In our relationship with the Master we want to feel close to him, but perhaps we do not take the time to seek him through meditation. So then if we feel far from the Master, guess who has moved! He does not change. He will not love us one day and reject us the next. He will not hear our prayers in the morning and ignore us in the afternoon.

Nor will he be close to us at satsang but deny us intimacy during the routine of life.

If we want a good and close relationship with our spouse and children, we need to work at it. We need to make time for them, speak to them, listen to them, play with them, and we do this even if there are times when we don't feel like it, because we recognize how important it is. Without this effort, we would soon become strangers and drift apart. The same is true of our relationship with the Master.

So when we experience times of spiritual barrenness, how should we respond? With meditation. Times of spiritual dryness and barrenness can be times of growth. A tree growing in an arid landscape needs to put down deep roots in order to reach water. In the same way, periods of spiritual dryness can encourage us to develop deeper spiritual roots. We will come to realize how we have grown only after the time of spiritual dryness has passed.

There comes a stage of spiritual dryness in the life of every satsangi. We are aiming to achieve something very high and it is not easily attainable. We get disheartened, lose confidence in ourselves, and many times we lose confidence in the Master and his teachings. When we don't achieve anything spiritually – after putting in a lot of effort – it breaks our heart. These moods keep coming and going. We feel very happy one moment and then downhearted the next.

The problem is that we have lost interest in this world, lost all our old moorings, our old shelters and our old faith. They no longer sustain us and we have nothing new to hold on to. Our goal is still far away and we're still struggling. We have not yet achieved anything spiritually but we have lost our taste for this life, and we have not yet gained a taste of another life. We are still struggling souls and we don't have much to show for our efforts. We are getting older and our face does not reflect any bliss, any contentment.

Still, we would never trade our anguish for the pleasures of this world. We need to learn the value of this pain of separation, even the struggling, because as a result of these our entire concept of life has changed.

We don't know what lies ahead – with our limited vision we cannot see. We don't know what mansions are being built for us within, or what our Master is doing for us in those regions. He has not given us an empty promise. While we are meditating here, we are building our future there. But it is concealed from us – and it *should* be concealed from us because we are not yet ready to see the results.

If we could see the results, we would be self-satisfied, our ego would come creeping in and we would rest on our laurels. We would get lazy, and we would forget our goal. We would have no use for the Lord anymore. We can't rest our oars while we are in stormy seas.

As long as we keep a chocolate away from our children, they will run after it. But once they get it, they might just eat a piece and not even finish it. So it is better if our chocolate is kept far away from us – because otherwise, with our mind as our guide, it would become very difficult for us to get release from this sense of self-satisfaction. If the results are hidden from us, then the pace with which we can progress will quicken. It is enough that the Master assures us that there are results, that we will not come back – even if it takes several lifetimes.

The day he initiates us, he assures us that from that day on we are free – we are insured, as it were – all we have to do is carry on paying the premiums in the form of meditation. When we die we will get our lump sum. If we have faith in the insurers of this world, does our Master's assurance not carry any weight for us? The soul has full faith in the Master, but it is overpowered by the very vocal, loud mind. The only way to quieten it is through simran, the language that the mind understands.

The journey to Sach Khand is a long one. We are not journeying to the first plane, or the second or the third – our destination is much farther. If this world is a hindrance to our spiritual journey, then the other spiritual planes will be far greater hindrances, as their temptations are much greater. We need to keep our attention focused on the goal and not give up.

When troubles come to us and break our egos and our old habits, we must not weep over them. If we lose something, we should be very happy that we are rid of this bit of debris. We have useless things collecting in our homes and there is no place for anything new and fresh. Our slate is full of old impressions. We need to wipe them off because they are useless. All our wisdom and knowledge is just good enough to earn us a decent living and material comforts. They don't have any spiritual value. We are connected to everyone else and to God, but we've allowed our fears and ego to edge us away from God.

Our goal of reaching Sach Khand should shine before us. If in the stormy seas of life we are tossed around by the raging waves, we must not lose hope. Our Master is the captain of the ship; he knows every part of this ocean, every current, every rock. He has been through it himself. He has taken ship-loads of people across. This journey may be long and dangerous, but every journey has an end, and we are safe in our Master's care, so we mustn't lose heart.



*O friend, do not despair;
I will show you this side and the other side of the creation.
I will raise your soul above the current
and with Shabd I will ferry your boat across.*

Soami Ji Maharaj, in *Voice of the Heart*

It's Hard to be Humble

Soami Ji explains that our first and strongest bond is physical. In *Sar Bachan Poetry* he says: “Your first bond is confinement to your body.”

The human body, which holds the door to liberation, is also the treacherous trap that ensnares and binds the soul to transmigration. This paradox arises because we are unable to locate, or even so much as get a glimpse of, this elusive entity called the soul – this bright shining thing – a diamond in the mud of the body. This being our condition, we sadly mistake the mud for our substance and revere it as a thing of eternal beauty.

In the late 1990s a rather amusing song with a very catchy tune became popular, and the words went like this:

*Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble
When you're perfect in every way.
I can't wait to look in the mirror
'Cause I get better lookin' each day.*

*To know me is to love me –
I must be a hell of a man.
Oh, Lord, it's hard to be humble
But I'm doin' the best that I can.*

The humour of the rather cheeky lyrics conveys to us how difficult it is to get rid of our pride, a disease of the mind that afflicts us all. When we look in the mirror all we see is a reflection of an illusion. An illusion is not necessarily something that does not exist, but rather something that we perceive incorrectly.

When we look in a mirror we tend to identify with the image and believe it is a true reflection of who we are. Yet we know, with absolute certainty, that when we die the body will dissolve back into the five elements: earth is destroyed by fire, fire is destroyed by water, water is dissolved by air and air is dissolved into ether.

So the body, though real to us, exists for a while and then vanishes as if into thin air. As long as we identify with the body, we will live for the body – to adorn it, to pamper it, to parade it, to cosmetically modify it into our idea of perfection. As long as we think we are merely these bodies we will continue to live shallow lives of indulgence. A healthy twenty to thirty-minute walk a day does not satisfy us. We feel we need to go to the gym, or do yoga or Pilates exercises. We are more focused on muscle definition and beauty than on a healthy body. Are we serving the body or is it serving us? Has it become our master or our slave? It's a question of keeping a balance.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Hazur Maharaj Ji tells us that our attention to the body – perhaps keeping up a programme of physical exercise to stay slim and trim – may puff up the ego and keep us away from the Lord. By contrast spiritual practice brings humility. He says:

With spiritual practices, we learn to digest the Lord's grace and humility comes to us. The more humble we become, the more he gives us. ... But in these other practices we generally become egoistic, and this takes us far away from our destination.

As long as we do not recognize that the body is like a bag of air that can collapse in a moment, we will continue to fool ourselves that we are living productive lives. When we prick an inflated balloon with a pin it pops – it stops being a balloon. It ceases to exist as we knew it. It loses its identity. This is exactly what happens to the body at the

moment of death. But even then, we still find it difficult to accept that the person has gone – that they have ceased to exist.

Perhaps it is for this reason that certain rituals were introduced into society. For example, in India there is a ritual where the eldest son breaks sticks and throws them into a fire signifying that the relationship between father and son is over. The karma has ended. Death is such a difficult reality for us to internalize that it is only when the body is consigned to the fire or buried underground that the family can begin to come to terms with the fact that the soul has moved on.

If we believe that we are only the body, what is there to look forward to after death? Many people are convinced that there is no life after the death of the body. Shakespeare eloquently speaks of the emptiness of such a life when he says in *Macbeth*:

*Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player, that struts and frets
his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more: it is a tale
told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.*

Stop for a moment and think about how much time we lavish on this body. Try adding up the minutes it takes to brush our teeth and bathe, to dress, to cook our food and eat our meals, to go to the gym or take our walk or whatever it is we do to keep fit. When we count up the minutes, they quickly turn into hours. As we consider this, we realize that most of our waking hours are spent in service to our first and strongest attachment – this bubble of a body.

While it is necessary to satisfy our basic needs, these are the body's needs and have nothing to do with humility or spirituality. After spending our lives pandering to the body and building ever stronger attachments to it, how can we ever detach from it? Hazur Maharaj Ji

used to say that detachment cannot cause attachment – meaning that detaching from the worldly will not create attachment to the spiritual. It is attachment to the Shabd that causes detachment from everything else. This attachment to Shabd can be attained only by practising the art of concentration. In *Divine Light* he explains:

One who is a little advanced in the art of concentration can reach the condition of having the whole body benumbed in a few minutes, and one who is still further advanced can do it in a matter of seconds, regardless of the position of the body. The moment that one succeeds in withdrawing the soul currents from the body, the physical body appears to that individual as the dead body of some other person. That is how detached one feels at this stage which is essential before we can go up.

Imagine looking at your body, a one-piece suit you have worn for years, loved so much and felt utterly at home in, only to realize that you have absolutely no more attachment to it – it could belong to someone else. In *Spiritual Gems* the Great Master, discussing the disposal of the body, says:

Just as when your shoes have become old and worn out, you no longer wear them, but dispose of them as convenient. The dead body is like a cast-off garment which may be disposed of as convenient.

And then, that thing that was perfect in every way, that ‘thing of beauty’, is no longer our pride and joy. As Hazur used to say: “What is there to be proud of?”



Our Most Important Work

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

1 Corinthians 3:16

This quote from the Bible is what Sant Mat is all about. The science of the soul teaches us how to look within this human body, the temple of God. During meditation we search within and become aware of the spirit of God that dwells within us.

According to all spiritual Masters, raising our consciousness to the inner spiritual regions is not only our highest task, but is also the primary purpose of our human existence and our birthright. In order to follow this path of God-realization, initiation by a living Master is essential. The message that the Master brings to us is that there is only one God and we can experience his presence during our lifetime – that is, before death.

In order to achieve God-realization, meditation must be the primary focus of all initiates on this path. Everything else is secondary. With the aid of our meditation we are able to extend our consciousness into transcendental dimensions and attain God-realization.

One could say that there are five stages to meditation. The first stage is learning to still the mind. This phase can be instantaneous at the time of our initiation, or it can take a lifetime of dedicated meditation. The second stage of meditation is when, after attaining and maintaining perfect concentration, we get to meet the Radiant or Shabd form of the Master. The third stage starts when the Shabd form of the Master guides the disciple safely through the astral and causal regions. The fourth stage is that of self-realization. This is when the soul reaches the fourth spiritual region, and in joy and ecstasy – the disciple having



Maharaj Charan Singh

shed body and mind – realizes that it is pure spirit. Our soul finally remembers what it really is and exclaims, “That am I.” The fifth and final stage is God-realization. This is when the soul merges with the divine Word, the Shabd, and all sense of duality evaporates. The drop becomes one with the Ocean.

As every Master tells us, true meditation – which is listening to the inner divine sound – is the only way back to our source and to salvation. In Psalms 46:10 we read: “Be still, and know that I am God.” That is a command to do our meditation.

Meditation is what this path is all about and its rewards are boundless. Through our practice we are ultimately transported to the highest spiritual regions – to the home the soul longs for. But unfortunately we often misunderstand and distort that longing into a never-ending desire for yet more possessions and more distractions.

Meditation is the way to freedom from everything that frightens and upsets us as human beings on this level of existence. It will transport us to regions of peace and beauty beyond imagination.

Our actions need to reflect our desires. Hazur Maharaj Ji also tells us in *Quest for Light*:

The love of the Lord is there for everyone and there is no question of withholding it from anyone. We have to make ourselves deserving of that love. If we are receptive, the love flows from within. It is nowhere outside. The source of it is within you, whence it has to grow through meditation.

The best approach to the day is to build our lives around Sant Mat, and not to try and fit Sant Mat somewhere into our lives. Our Master is not unaware of the difficulties of living a demanding life, full of responsibilities. That’s why he says that the smallest effort on our part

to keep this Sant Mat discipline will be rewarded a hundredfold by his grace. All our little baby-steps towards him are how we attempt to make ourselves deserving of that love.

With the aid of our meditation, we gradually become aware of the divine sound as exquisite spiritual music. This is not some fairy story. This is real, as all Masters throughout the ages have emphasized. It was real in ancient times and it is real today.

It has been so long that our attention has been turned away from the Father that we cannot expect to work miracles and, with a few sittings of meditation, think that we can go within and see the Shabd form of the Master. In fact, we cannot do it on our own. It is only by his grace that any progress is made. But we need to be vigilant. We need to show up for our meditation every morning. We need to make the ground fertile, and only then will the seed of Nam sprout.

Huzur Maharaj Ji was asked: 'Where does effort come from? Does it come from grace?' This was his reply:

They both go together. Without grace, effort will not come, and without effort, you will not get grace. Without the Lord's grace you would never be on the path and would never meet the Master, nor would you be filled with the desire to meditate. So first came his grace and now should come the desire for meditation.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

So now that we have received his grace in the form of initiation, we have to put in the effort to meditate. Now that we know his grace is there, we must put in the effort to respond to that grace. He has played his part and now we must play ours. He is waiting for our effort so that he can reward us with even more grace. It is time to take

responsibility, to the extent that we strictly adhere to the vows we take at the time of initiation.

As initiates of a perfect Master, we are all trying to merge with the divine Sound that is pulsating through everything and everybody. We are trying to transcend the physical and obtain personal spiritual experience with the help of the ultimate mystic adept – our Master.

The Master teaches us how to cross the gates of death even during our lifetime, and see for ourselves all that is hidden beyond. It is quite true that no ordinary person can physically return to us after their death to give us news of the next world. However, in a spiritual context, a perfect mystic adept dies to the world and returns to act in the world at will. As liberated souls, they freely roam about in all the spiritual planes. They tell us about the other world, and at the time of our death they can help us in our journey to those spiritual regions.

If during meditation we also manage – as soul – to go into the subtle planes, we can also see the spiritual world before our death. This is what this path does for us: it teaches us how to die daily and go into the spiritual realms before our final physical death. It teaches us to unveil the hidden mystery of these realms, and then come back into the physical body.

The author of *A Spiritual Primer* says:

Saints point out that there are people who, while living in the world and carrying out their duties, remain detached. Being always aware of their spiritual nature, they remain constantly in touch with it. They live in the midst of illusion and are not deceived.... They have achieved perfect balance between their worldly and spiritual duties and have escaped the stress and misery of the world. They are people who have made spirituality their number one priority, and by living the saints' teachings, they have merged their consciousness with the power behind all life.

So do we sit in silence, focus and really listen? Can we perceive the divine presence and hear the loving divine Voice? For nearly two centuries, the successive Masters in the Radha Soami line have been impressing upon us that meditation is the most important work we can do in this lifetime. They may couch their message in various ways – by pleading with us, begging, or hammering us, but no matter how they vary it, the content remains the same. What else can be said to convey the importance of their message?

The Master never downplays the importance of meditation. He has never told us that this is not important. He has never told us that there are other things that should be done in place of meditation. It is neither the second nor the third most important – it is *the* most important work for us to do.

In order for us to become true disciples we need to have equipoise, which means calmness, balance, serenity and stability. The only way to obtain equipoise is through daily meditation, by which we bring balance into our lives. We need to simplify our lives and not collect unnecessary burdens upon ourselves. The simpler our life, the more balanced it will be. We can be either fresh and balanced when we sit to be with our Master, or we can be exhausted and distressed. The choice is ours. If equipoise is not present in our lives, then we must simplify our lives and find serenity in the comfort of meditation and, if possible, our Master's darshan.

Darshan is the helplessness of the lover gazing at the beloved. It is a cycle of pure love passing between the lover and the beloved. Receptiveness in darshan of the physical Master can lead to the darshan of the Shabd form, which is the goal of all initiates. This darshan of the Shabd form is what we must strive to achieve in this lifetime.



The Five Pathans

In *With the Three Masters*, Vol. 1, the author reproduces a letter in which a young satsangi tells how the Great Master appeared to him and protected him during a frightening experience. The satsangi wrote:

“My Satguru, I am a foolish person. I am eighteen years old and was initiated about four or five years back. My simran is going on well with your grace and your Sarup (form) is always with me. I wish to relate an incident that took place one day at about four in the afternoon.

I was coming home on my bicycle from a town, through an open space on an unmetalled road. At one place near a turning I saw five Pathans standing by the side of the road and they asked me to stop. I did not comply with their wishes and they shouted at me fiercely a second time. I passed by them when they again asked me to stop. My cycle fell on its side bringing me down with it, but I at once got up and enquired what they wanted. They said: “We want your life.”

Suddenly I felt as if their features had undergone a change. I did not remember even my simran but I at once remembered you and you gave me darshan within and then disappeared.

Presently a form appeared in your likeness and the five Pathans drew back. That form asked me to bow down at his feet as he was my Guru. I was bewildered, for when I fixed my eyes on the form I could see that the forehead and the eyes were not my Master's. I then told him that he was the deceiver of the whole world and not my Guru, and I would not bow before him. He looked at me menacingly and then with great effort I started my simran, at which that form disappeared.

Then I saw you, my gracious Master, about ten paces away coming towards me, holding your stick in hand. I then fully recognized you, continued my simran and gave you the Radha Soami salutation. You then praised my courage and said, “Well done, child. This is how you should have behaved.” Then you told me to go away, at which I submitted that after you have departed I would leave. At this, you moved away a little and disappeared.

The five Pathans who had shrunk away again came out and asked my permission to go away. I said I had nothing to do with them and it was for them to decide to go away or remain there. I then rode my bicycle and went my way. The Pathans followed me. I asked them as to what exactly they wanted. They replied that they wanted my orders to go. I said, “Go,” and almost instantly they evaporated into thin air.

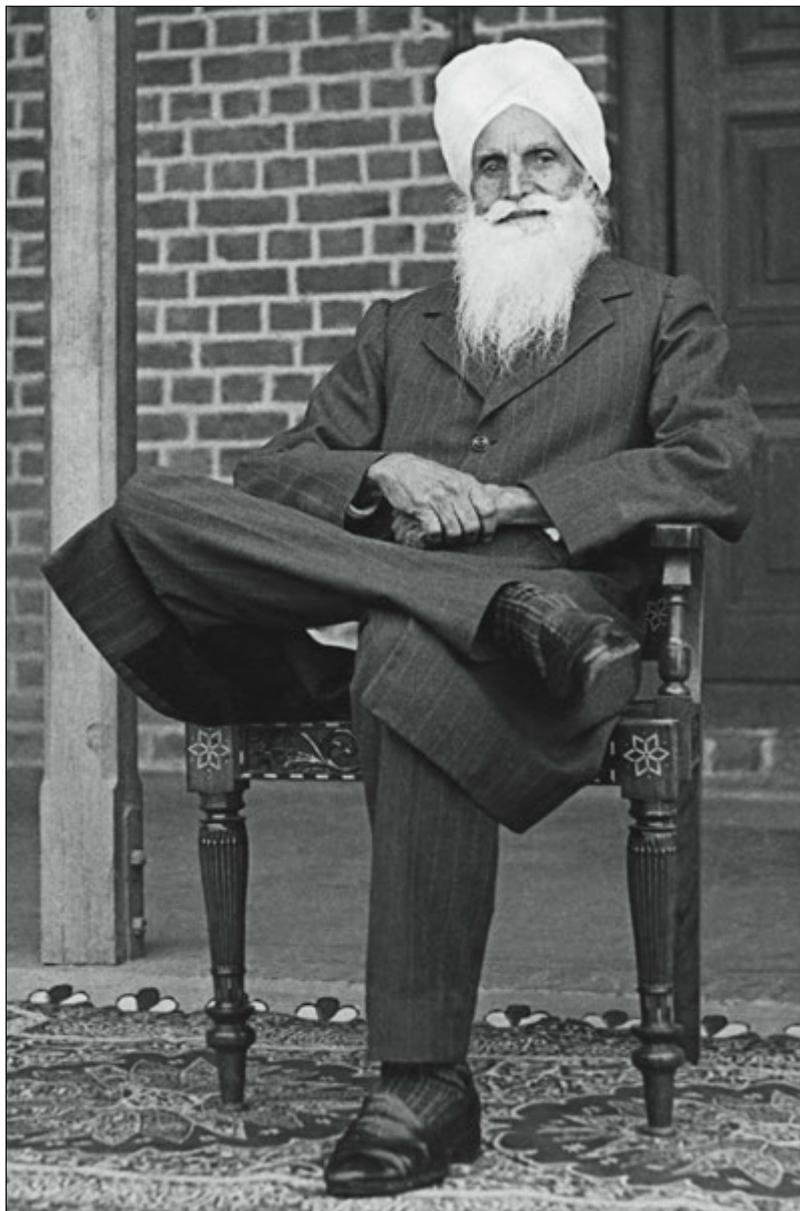
My dear Satguru, this is not something that happened to me in a dream or in meditation, but in broad daylight. My Master, the form that came in your guise must have been Kal, but who were the five Pathans?”

After listening to the letter, Huzur said, “Thank the Lord. He escaped.”



*This fragile body will go one day,
it's a dream you can't rely on.
It's the shadow of a cloud
that shifts, changes, disappears.
A mirage lives for a moment –
so does every thought and dream.
So much work and worry, says Eknath,
for all that dies one day.*

Eknath, in Many Voices, One Song



Maharaj Sawan Singh

He Who Knows – Knows

An old Persian proverb gives the following advice:

He who knows not, and knows not that he knows not, is a fool – shun him.

He who knows not, and knows that he knows not, is ignorant – teach him.

He who knows, and knows not that he knows, is asleep – wake him.

He who knows, and knows that he knows, is a wise man – follow him.

The only man who knows, and knows that he knows, is a perfect Master. When the grace of God reveals such a man to a seeker of truth, something in the seeker will resonate with this revelation. When this happens, the seeker should discard everything and follow the Master, having full trust and faith in him. This will be the start of a process of change: of spiritual healing and total transformation. Our attitude and perceptions will change.

In *Discourses on Sant Mat*, Vol. II Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh explains how our karmas may define our attitude towards faith:

Three men went to a faqeer and he asked them. “What’s troubling you?” One said, “Everybody is without faith.” The second said, “Here and there you find a glimmer of faith.” The third said, “Absolutely everybody is filled with faith. God and God alone is all one sees!”

Yet to each of the three the faqeer said, “That’s right.”

A disciple asked, “What was that about?”

The faqeer replied, “The way they see things depends on the kind of glasses they’ve put on. The first one was completely worldly; the second, slightly God-fearing; the third was a man of God.”

Our appearance and intellect reflect precisely the type of karmas we have done in the past, and we look on the world accordingly. If you want to escape from all this, keep the company of a true Master.

Saints tell us that most of the people in the world live in darkness or ignorance. So many questions are constantly asked about why we live in a world where nobody is truly happy, where everything is subject to decay, and where birth and death follow each other like day and night. Apart from people’s personal struggles to survive, the media relentlessly harass us with news and images of accelerating world devastation, making us aware of the misery prevailing all over the globe.

Even more painful is that which takes place right on our own doorstep. At times we become overwhelmed by a sense of utter desolation, despair, hopelessness and a feeling of dejection. In mystic terms this is described as the dark night of the soul. These are the grief-stricken times when we feel as though we have been plunged into a well of loneliness and we feel disconnected from everything. When this happens, it is the Master who comes to our rescue. He is the only one who can throw a life-saving rope down our well of loneliness and pull us out of the darkness into his light.

Initiates on this path of Sant Mat know that even after initiation and many years of steadfast meditation, a sudden load of dreadfully heavy karma can – without any warning – bring on a dark night of the soul. Saints and mystics confirm that these dark nights are a part of the long journey towards self-realization and ultimate God-realization. Hazur

Maharaj Ji explains that it sometimes feels as if we have been forsaken and his grace has been withdrawn. But these are the times when vital karmas have to be paid. These are the times when the Master carries us – although we may not be aware of it.

At the time of initiation the Master sows the seed of Nam in the disciple and nothing can destroy it. Nam is the perfect seed; it will sprout, grow and eventually bear perfect fruit. Nothing can prevent this. No matter how devastating our karma may be, we should always remember that the Master himself controls our destiny, and that Nam is the very essence of the teachings of Sant Mat, linking the initiate to God himself.

It is said that God is love and that love is neutral. His love is the same for all and everything that he created. However, we will only be able to understand and accept this concept when we merge into him. This ability to merge into him is what the Master – slowly but steadily – builds in us. Through our simran and bhajan, he pulls our consciousness up, from the soles of the feet to the eye centre, where birth into the spiritual world occurs. Consciousness is the component that animates all living beings and which we refer to as the soul. It is part of the omnipresence of the Creator – the Shabd particle in us.

Only in absolute stillness can God manifest and reveal himself to us within. We have to shut down the sense perceptions that lead to illusory outer manifestations. For some it is necessary to become totally disillusioned with the outer world before being able to move into the inner world and merge into the Shabd. Whatever our karma, we should bear it with equanimity, keeping in mind that our meditation is the instrument that carries us from outer disillusionment to inner peace.

Our transformation is painstaking and slow and it cannot be forced. We need patience for the evolutionary process to manifest within us as we move towards liberation – freedom from the bondage of birth

and death, reincarnation and transmigration. Through meditation we learn to still the mind and the intellect, and only then will the tenth door – the gate to heaven – swing open.

Eventually every initiate realizes that it is not merely a matter of reading, listening and waiting for a miracle to happen. Rather, we have to put it all into practice. We have to follow the principles and do the meditation which is necessary for our salvation. In *Die to Live* Hazur Maharaj Ji tells us quite simply:

Just change your way of life according to the teachings and attend to meditation. That is all that is required. From meditation, love will come, submission will come, humility will come. Everything will come.

Progress is very slow, and because we are impatient for spiritual experiences we often feel that we are not making any progress at all – especially if we do not experience the results which we read about in the Sant Mat literature. However, there is no alternative but to continue on our path to salvation. In the same book Hazur Maharaj Ji assures us that progress is always there. In response to a question he says:

By attending to meditation, even if we don't feel any progress within, we will definitely feel the effect of meditation in our life. Progress we may not see within, but we will feel the effect of meditation in our nature, in our dealings with people, in the way our whole attitude towards life changes. We should not feel much concerned about progress, because progress is always there. The effect of meditation can never be removed, and nobody can escape that effect.

The Masters repeatedly emphasize that meditation should be a satsangi's top priority. Yes, we do have to work to pay the baker and the candlestick maker, but nothing is more important than fulfilling our part of the spiritual bargain by doing our meditation.

The mind is influenced by the company it keeps. We must keep the company of the one who has manifested the truth within – the Master. Many of the people who come in contact with him are naturally drawn towards spirituality. If we are receptive to the Master we shall experience his grace and love. His satsang is hugely beneficial for the successful practice of spiritual discipline and, ultimately, release from this world. However, if we prefer to keep the company of the world, we will stay in it – time after time being swallowed back into Kal's recycling soap opera, where sowing and reaping are the prevailing law.

But if the grace of God brings us into the fold of the Master, and we receive his gift of initiation, we will begin our association with the truth. Through the practice of our meditation we will begin to turn our attention away from the world. As the Master slowly transforms our lives he detaches us from worldly illusion and directs us to everlasting spiritual freedom.

Meditation is his gift – there is nothing else to be done as nothing else is of any value. Do not refuse it, do not neglect it. Just do it.



*The Beloved is with us day and night, O Hafiz!
He is the very life that flows in our veins.*

As quoted in Sultan Bahu

The Boulevard of Karma

The cosmos isn't a one-way street. It is a circular boulevard, for whatever good and bad we send out into the world eventually returns to us. Consider this Sufi story related by Idries Shah:

One night a thief, trying to climb through the window of a house which he intended to rob, fell because the window-frame broke, hit the ground and broke his leg.

He went to court to sue the owner of the house.

This man said:

“Sue the carpenter who put the window in.”

The carpenter said: “The builder did not make the window-aperture properly.”

When the builder was called, he said: “My fault was caused by a beautiful woman who was passing while I was working at the window.”

The woman was found, and she said: “I was wearing a beautiful gown at the time. Normally, nobody looks at me. It is the fault of the gown, which was cunningly dyed in variegated stripes.”

“Now we have the culprit,” said the judge; “Call the man who did the dyeing and he shall be held responsible for the harm done to the leg of the thief.”

When they found the dyer, he turned out to be the husband of the woman. It so happened that this was – the thief himself.

As quoted in Life Is Fair



Conscious Uncoupling

Conscious uncoupling may seem an odd term to apply to Sant Mat. After all, it is more appropriately used in a worldly context as a way of dealing with the break-up of a relationship. But isn't that what we as initiates are attempting to do – to consciously uncouple from the bonds of the physical world, both in our relationships and with our possessions?

We tend to approach a break-up in an aggressive and extremely negative way. All our worst traits appear, such as anger, greed, attachment and vanity. Suddenly we are not the person we thought we were. In a sense we go back to being children – we throw tantrums and act out our perceived hurt, anger and rejection. Not only do we hurt ourselves and our partner, but family and friends are hurt in the process as well. Albert Einstein said: “Only two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity, and I am not sure about the former.”

Conscious uncoupling, however, is about something quite different. The basic approach is love. It means that we remove our ego from our actions and try and look at a situation objectively. This means we act without anger, rejection or possessiveness. It means shifting our perception away from blaming someone else for everything we feel. It means taking responsibility for ourselves and our own actions, which means we have to start acting consciously rather than reacting unconsciously. We need to look inwards to where we already have the answers, rather than outwards.

It means growing up very fast! Moving from child to adult in one step. The child in us is the one who throws the tantrums – who shouts and screams and wants its way no matter what the situation. The parent in us is the judgmental part, the part that wants to tell someone else what to do and how to do it; while the adult, on the other hand,

stands aside from the situation and looks at everything objectively and compassionately.

So what is the point of all this? Believe it or not, we as satsangis are actually busy with a very similar process. We are in the process of detaching from the world and attaching ourselves to something else. In other words, we are uncoupling from the world – from everything we think is so important to us – and we are trying to attach ourselves to the Shabd within.

Unfortunately we are often unconscious of this inner process as we allow the events in our lives to take up our time. We may be trying to focus our consciousness during our meditation, but during the rest of our day our consciousness is scattered in the world. Conscious uncoupling, on the other hand, means that we start taking responsibility for our thinking and consciously look at every action, every experience, every interaction.

There is also an element of conscious decision-making in which we decide how to react to a person or situation. The more we make this a conscious process, the more we will be aware of what we are doing or how we are reacting. It means being totally honest with ourselves.

However, we should bear in mind that it is only by attaching ourselves to something more powerful that we begin to become detached and start to uncouple from the things of the world. When, through our meditation, we reach that exalted state where we are consciously attached to the Shabd, that attachment will automatically release us from worldly attachments.

Uncoupling is an exceedingly slow process and we only accomplish it with the grace of our Master and the effort of our meditation. Meditation – without our even being aware of it – is the great ‘uncoupler’. It helps us to gently loosen the bonds and soften the blows. At the same time it creates love and humility in us. As the

Masters have often said: satsangis should become better parents, better husbands, wives and citizens. This means loving without attachment, without expectation. And the only way to do that is to be consciously uncoupled from the processes and actions taking place. It is to be fully aware, fully conscious every moment.

There is a huge amount of literature about living consciously. After all, the Buddhists have been advocating this for thousands of years – they call it ‘mindfulness’.

The first step in this uncoupling process is clear thinking. Clear thinking sounds deceptively simple, but it isn’t. Looking at ourselves objectively, can we really say that we are rational, clear-thinking beings or are we more likely to fall into Einstein’s category of ‘human stupidity’?

Clear thinking can be applied to every aspect of our lives. All it takes is to stop a thought or action and think about what is being said or done and the resultant consequences. Doing so can stop arguments and unpleasant situations. It means looking at ourselves, our actions and our behaviour dispassionately – but with compassion. Clear thinking is about honesty – perhaps that is why we often don’t want to practise it. It ignites the clear, clean light of reason.

In a spiritual sense it means that we should stop for a moment and ask ourselves: “Am I doing what I’m supposed to be doing?” We often get caught up in everyday life and we forget that we are here for a very different reason – our spiritual growth. We need to stop for a moment and look at ourselves and our loved ones and see everything for the illusion it is.

Clear thinking leads us to understanding, which makes us realize that things are not as they seem. We see things as we want to see them and not as they are. We need to understand how our thinking and false concepts have led us to behave. Clear thinking allows us to be aware of how our actions and words may affect others – not only

human beings but all of life. Understanding brings us to the point where we know that we ourselves are the architects of our lives. For as Mirdad, the spiritual teacher in *The Book of Mirdad*, says:

You choose your birth and death, their time and place and their manner as well despite your wayward memory which is a mesh of falsehoods with glaring holes and gaps. ... There are no accidents in time and space. But all things are ordered by the Omni-will which neither errs in anything, nor overlooks a thing.

From understanding comes responsibility – which can often be uncomfortable to accept. The more we realize that we are responsible for everything that happens to us, the less we will be inclined to blame others for our misfortunes. It means that when someone wrongs us, we take responsibility for that wrong. Is that possible? Again we refer to Mirdad who said:

Aye, man invites his own calamities and then protests against the irksome guests, having forgotten how and when and where he penned and sent out the invitations.

Through the theory of karma we learn that what happens to us is never random – we always have a part to play. Every account has to be settled, and when it gets settled we go our different ways. So it is with relationships, friends, family and even our possessions. Taking responsibility for our actions can be a humbling experience and helps us accept outcomes with equanimity. We can also take the responsibility not to act. In other words – not to retaliate and instead work towards stopping the cycle of action and reaction.

Karma is a vast encompassing theory. It refers not only to our actions but also to the seeds we plant for our future. What is stored in our karma will, over time, direct our lives in a particular direction. Whether we plant seeds of good actions or seeds of bad actions, they will have the effect of bringing us back into the creation. Therefore the challenge we face is not to plant seeds of ill will or revenge but instead to plant seeds of goodwill and generosity.

We have sole responsibility for our thoughts and actions – nobody owes us anything. We should also be aware that life will take its course and we cannot interfere, no matter how much we may want to. When we truly understand this we will let things happen as they should. The Sufi poet Hafiz says:

*Even after all this time,
The sun never says to the earth,
'You owe me.'
Look what happens with
A love like that.
It lights the whole sky.*

Understanding leads us to the practice of meditation. But practice also means the way we live our lives. It is both living the path and doing our meditation. Living the path means living according to the Masters' principles that guide us on our spiritual path. Through this practice and our meditation we learn to harness our faculty of clear thinking, using it to guide our actions so that we live according to the highest moral standards. It means understanding the result of every thought, word and action. By understanding that we ourselves are responsible for everything that happens to us, we learn to live

without expectations – to simply flow within the stream of life without getting hurt or hurting others.

The purpose of meditation, especially our simran, is to lull the mind to sleep. Just as the poet says in the *Robe of Glory*:

*And I began to charm him,
The terrible loud-breathing serpent.
I hushed him to sleep and lulled him to slumber
By naming the name of my Father upon him.*

The loud-breathing serpent represents the restless mind which is hushed by our repetition. Then, when the mind becomes still, we enter the inner chamber in the awareness of our soul – at this stage nothing else matters.

The result of conscious uncoupling from the world and coupling with the inner path is the start of our journey to our true home. Only the perfect Masters who have travelled the journey can show us the way – they walk with us and light our way. Without them we would be lost forever.



He who thinks of evil has no purity. For how can a heart be pure in a man who is defiled by unclean thoughts, as a mirror is dimmed by dust?

Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart



Change the World by Changing Me

The Sufi Bayazid says this about himself:

I was a revolutionary when I was young and all my prayer to God was “Lord, give me the energy to change the world.” As I approached middle age and realized that half my life was gone without my changing a single soul, I changed my prayer to “Lord, give me the grace to change all those who come in contact with me. Just my family and friends, and I shall be satisfied.” Now that I am an old man and my days are numbered, my one prayer is, “Lord, give me the grace to change myself.” If I had prayed for this right from the start I should not have wasted my life.

Anthony de Mello, *The Song of the Bird*

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If you wish to submit an article for publication in *Spiritual Link*, please mail a printed, typed version by post to one of the following addresses. *Emailed submissions will not be accepted.*

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If accepted, your article will be edited according to the requirements of the magazine. You will be contacted only if your submission is accepted. Please include your name, age, postal address, and email address with your article.

Book Review



The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination

BY WILLIAM C. CHITTICK

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The eleventh-century Sufi mystic Ibn al-‘Arabi (1165-1240 CE), was called *al-Shaikh al-Akbar*, “the Greatest Shaikh,” by his followers, a sobriquet by which he is still honoured today. His influence on Sufi thought cannot be overstated. The young Ibn al-‘Arabi was given an education normal for his times, and not particularly religious. But beginning about age 15 he was blessed with “openings” or “unveilings” – revelations – of the non-material world. He began to visit saints and holy men, and in 1202 was inspired to go on pilgrimage to Mecca, where he experienced further “openings.” His most comprehensive work is the encyclopaedic 560-chapter, 37-volume (17,000 page) *Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Openings* or *The Meccan Illuminations*).

In *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, William Chittick presents over 600 passages from this work, many translated for the first time into English. The *Futuhāt* is wide-ranging, covering among many topics Sufi practices, mystic philosophy, and the Shaikh’s own visions and dreams. His thought is both subtle and complex. Because Chittick feels that Ibn al-‘Arabi’s ideas have often been misinterpreted, he presents the Shaikh’s teachings in the Shaikh’s own words. Chittick organized his selections into six main sections: Theology, Ontology, Epistemology, Hermeneutics, Soteriology, and Consummation. Chittick provides his own explanatory introductions to the book and to each section, but these are brief.

Ibn al-‘Arabi claims that knowledge “is the secret of man’s felicity.” He is not referring to intellectual knowledge, but rather knowledge of God from direct perception. This knowledge comes from unveilings or openings of the non-material realms. Chittick translates the term Ibn al-‘Arabi uses for these realms as the “imaginal” worlds, a term that can imply either

God's imagination or man's imagination. It explains the book's subtitle: *Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*.

Ibn al-'Arabi says that the prophets and saints "have no knowledge of God derived from reflection. God has purified them from that. Rather, they possess the 'opening of unveiling' through the Real." As Ibn al-'Arabi expresses it, we come to know "what is in the Self of the Real" through "listening" to God's "speech":

The cosmos can have no existence without Speech on God's part and listening on the part of the cosmos. Hence the existence of the paths of felicity only becomes manifest... through the Divine Speech and the engendered listening. Therefore, all the messengers [prophets] came with speech, such as the Koran, the Torah, the Gospels, the Psalms, and the Scriptures.... Speech and listening are interrelated. Neither can be independent from the other, since they are two terms of a relationship. Through Speech and listening, we come to know what is in the Self of the Real, since we have no knowledge of Him except through the knowledge that He gives to us, and His giving of knowledge takes place through His Speech.

Ibn al-'Arabi differentiates ordinary knowledge – such as when we know and understand certain teachings – from what he calls knowledge by tasting. He explains this through the example of trusting in God. Every religious person may know that he should trust in God, but the one with "tasting" does trust in God.

The tasting of trust which is added to knowledge of trust is that the person does not become agitated when he lacks that upon which the soul relies. Instead, the soul relies upon God, not upon the specific secondary cause.... For example, someone is hungry, and he does not have the secondary cause – the food – which will eliminate his hunger. Another person is hungry, and he has the means to eliminate his hunger. The person who has the secondary cause is strong through the existence of the food which will eliminate the hunger, but the other person, who does not have it, equals him in calm and lack of agitation, since he knows that his provision – if he is to receive any

more provision – must reach him. This lack of agitation in a person who has such an attribute while he does not possess the secondary cause is called “tasting.”

For Ibn al-‘Arabi, knowledge of God cannot be separated from love of God. In fact, he claims that “the lover’s heart, not his reason or his sense perception” is the faculty capable of knowing God. He likens the heart to “the goblet of love.”

For the heart fluctuates from state to state, just as God – who is the Beloved – is “Each day upon some task” (55:29). So the lover undergoes constant variation in the object of his love in keeping with the constant variation of the Beloved in His acts. The lover is like the clear and pure glass goblet which undergoes constant variation according to the variation of the liquid within it. The colour of the lover is the colour of the Beloved. This belongs only to the heart, since reason comes from the world of delimitation; that is why it is called “reason (‘aql),” a word derived from “fetter.” As for sense perception, it obviously and necessarily belongs to the world of delimitation, in contrast to the heart.

This can be explained by the fact that love has many diverse and mutually opposed properties. Hence nothing receives these properties except that which has the capacity (quwwa) to fluctuate along with love in those properties. This belongs only to the heart.

Permeating Ibn al-‘Arabi’s teachings is the Quranic concept of God’s Names, said to be ninety-nine in number. According to the Shaikh, the universe and everything in it is the manifestation of these Names. To the limited human perception the universe appears in ceaseless conflict, but from a higher perspective this apparent conflict fulfils the beautiful purpose of the Names – perhaps not unlike how contrasting sounds are necessary to produce a harmonious symphony. These Names come in opposites, each with its particular attribute, like *al-ghafūr*, the Forgiver, and *al-muntaqim*, the Vengeful. The only Name that encompasses all the attributes is *Allah*. To human beings is given the privilege of manifesting any Name they choose (albeit often unconsciously), for, as Chittick writes, “A human possesses every name of God – every ontological possibility – within himself. But

in order to attain to felicity, he must bring these attributes into actuality according to the correct scale.” The “felicitous” are those who discern the divine harmony in the ninety-nine seemingly opposing names of God.

According to Ibn al-‘Arabi, the path toward knowledge of God is a great joy for the felicitous, but not for those who cling to their own fixed ideas:

Knowledge, the greatest good, is also the greatest joy and the greatest pleasure. ... For the felicitous, this knowledge is totally congruent and harmonious with their own souls, which have been shaped in this world through faith and practice, and hence every increase in knowledge is an increase in felicity. For the wretched, knowledge of things as they actually are is a searing torture, since it contradicts their beliefs and practices in this world.

According to Ibn al-‘Arabi, knowledge of God can only come through dedicated spiritual practice. “In our view, knowledge requires practice, and necessarily so, or else it is not knowledge, even if it appears in the form of knowledge.” Another vital requirement for attaining knowledge is the guidance of a living Shaikh – one who has “verified” within himself the truths of spirituality.

For Ibn al-‘Arabi, knowledge of God implies such a union between the knower and that which is known that God sees, hears, and acts through the person.

When the soul becomes limpid and wholesome, joins up with the world of purity, looks with the divine eye, hears through Him, and acts through His strength, then it knows the origins of things and their destinations, where they rise up and whence they return. This is called “perspicacity through faith.” It is a gift of God which is attained by those who are sound in nature and those who are not.

The knowledge of God is a gift from God. He can give it to whomsoever he chooses.



